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No. XIX.

Account of a Large Wen, successfully extirpated by John Syng Dorsey, M. D.—Read, 1817.

THE paper which I have the honour of presenting to the Society, contains the history of a steatomatous tumour, of very unusual magnitude, successfully extirpated.

The patient, Julia Richards, a negro woman, from Carlisle, in Pennsylvania, was aged about forty-five years, and enjoyed good health ; she was corpulent, but active, until her exertions were restrained by the incumbrance of her tumour.

She stated that it had been first noticed about eighteen years before I saw her ;—that it had grown gradually, and had never been painful. When she applied to me, her attitude in walking resembled that of a woman carrying a large and heavy sack. On examination, I found the tumour arising at the upper part of the back, extending equally on both sides, and although pendulous from its weight, yet the root of it was very large. The annexed engraving, (Plate VIII.) represents it better than it can be described ;—the dimensions were as follow.

Circumference at the neck or narrowest part of the tumour,
two feet ten inches.

Circumference at the thickest part, vertically, three feet nine inches.

Circumference horizontally, three feet one inch and a half.

The circumference of the waist after the wen was removed, was two feet nine and a half inches, so that the narrowest part of the tumour was thicker than the patient's body.

The surface of the tumour was tolerably regular, but very large and numerous veins were seen in various parts of it.

The patient was admitted into the Pennsylvania Hospital, and on the 22d of February, 1815, I proceeded to remove the tumour. Having previously administered an opiate, I placed her (at the suggestion of Dr. Physick,) on her face upon the table, fifteen minutes before commencing the operation, and directed assistants to elevate the tumour in such a manner as to empty it as completely as possible of blood, and I was greatly delighted to perceive the change in the size of the superficial veins, which resulted from this simple expedient, many of them contracted and could not be perceived.

The operation was commenced by external incisions calculated to preserve skin enough to cover the surface left by the removal of the tumour, and this skin being dissected and turned back, which was the most tedious part of the operation, the tumour by large and rapid incisions, was detached from its base and removed. It adhered to some of the spinous processes of the vertebræ, and to the muscles and tendons near the spine. The operation occupied twenty-one minutes; and the loss of blood was very trifling.—The skin was found to adapt itself very well to the denuded parts, and was secured by strips of adhesive plaster, compresses and bandages.

The greater part of the sore united by the first intention; no unpleasant symptoms occurred, and the patient was discharged cured, on the 15th April. She is at this time, and has been ever since the operation, perfectly well.

The tumour was found to weigh twenty-five pounds, but when filled with blood, was probably much heavier.

The tumour of Eleanor Fitzgerald, described by Mr. John Bell; and that of a negro woman, published in the Medical Repository of New York, (Vol. III. New Series) were of enormous magnitude, but adherent by small bases. The basis in the present instance was very great, and I am not aware that so large a tumour has been ever before extirpated.

Remarks.—The most important practical precept derived from this case, is the influence of position on the circulation of the blood. I once attended an operation on a tumour of comparatively small size, seated on the back, the extirpation of which was found impracticable, in consequence of bleeding from the superficial veins. In the treatment of hemorrhagy from blood vessels in the extremities, and on certain local inflammations, an elevated position is often found of great importance. I have seen a bleeding from an artery in an aneurismal arm, in which circumstances precluded the use of a ligature or tourniquet, effectually arrested by an elevated posture, the hand being constantly kept in a vertical position.

These remarks, although somewhat digressive, are in my opinion of too much importance to be omitted. The practice of employing position to empty blood-vessels for surgical purposes, in the case alluded to, and others, so far as I know, originated with Dr. Physick, and my own experience has afforded numerous proofs of its value, and convinced me that it has been too much neglected by surgeons.

PLATE XXV

